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WHEN THE STATE GOES DIGITAL

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Abstract

This report analyzes the expanding role of the state in the platform economy, comparing public and cooperative alternatives to dominant investor-owned platforms primarily in India, with additional cases in South Korea, Brazil, and China. Through case studies of Kerala Savaari, BaedalTeukgeup, Coomappa, Shouqi Yueche, and Taxi.Rio, Gopal's report argues that platform success or failure is determined not by the presence of state involvement per se, but by how that involvement is institutionally configured in relation to governance, worker sovereignty, and digital infrastructure. It identifies four recurring constraints: 1) bureaucratic centralization, 2) adverse market structure, 3) infrastructural dependence, and 4) the suppression of democratic governance. Ganesh Gopal develops policy recommendations for governments seeking to support platform cooperatives without capturing them. India's emerging national taxi cooperative, Sahkar Taxi (Bharat Taxi), is examined as an institutional experiment that navigates between bureaucratic stagnation, technocratic centralization, and reliance on venture capital–backed technical systems.

Keywords: Platform cooperativism, state-backed platforms,, digital infrastructure, infrastructural dependence, Kerala Savaari, Sahkar Taxi, Bharat Taxi.

1. Introduction

Across multiple countries, platform capitalism is facing not only an economic or social crisis, but a deepening crisis of legitimacy. Platforms promise frictionless services, yet routinely deliver precarious work, shifting risks onto workers while consolidating profits in the hands of investors and platform owners.

This contradiction has generated two distinct political responses. The first response is worker-led experimentation with platform cooperatives, seeking to embed democratic ownership and fair distribution into platform governance. The second response, which is a less theorized one but rapidly expanding, is the state's entry, not only as a regulator but also as a platform builder, investor or owner. This framing attempts to capture what is at stake, the core question is not discursive but structural: what differentiates a state-owned platform cooperative from a cooperative platform supported by the state, and why does that difference matter for autonomy and democratic control?

The ICDE report draws on cases from around the world, including Kerala Savaari in India, BaedalTeukgeup in South Korea, and Coomappa in Araraquara, Brazil, as examples of projects that stalled, and compares them with Shouqi Yueche in China and Taxi.Rio in Brazil, which represent relatively more successful efforts.

It argues that outcomes depend less on "state involvement" and more on governance design, infrastructural autonomy, and the alignment of stakeholder power with cooperative principles.

Kerala Savaari: Promise, Launch, and Administrative Drift

In August 2022, the Government of Kerala launched Kerala Savaari, India's first state-owned ride-hailing platform. Announced as a corrective to the extractive practices of Uber and Ola, the app promised fixed fares, zero commissions, and protection from algorithmic discrimination. For a brief moment in time, Kerala Savaari appeared to materialize a long-standing aspiration of the platform coop-

erativism movement: a digital alternative that prioritized workers over venture capital. By late 2024, the platform had quietly ceased to function.

Drivers abandoned the app due to lack of rides and technical failures. Passengers returned to private platforms because Kerala Savaari could not match even minimal standards of reliability and usability. The collapse was not publicly acknowledged as a failure; it simply dissolved into administrative silence. What remained was a familiar pattern: a well-intentioned state intervention undone not by lack of demand, but by the political and institutional limits of the state itself. However, the story does not end here. The Kerala government relaunched the platform in November 2025 as Kerala Savaari 2.0, built on an open-source mobility stack, a substantive corrective in favour of the platform, that nonetheless leaves deeper questions of worker governance unresolved.

The Wrong Kind of State Intervention

This reportr argues that models such as Kerala Savaari did not fail because the state intervened in platform capitalism, but because it intervened in the wrong way. The state attempted to own the platform rather than enable worker control over it. In doing so, it reproduced the very asymmetries of power, opacity, and dependency that platform cooperativism seeks to dismantle.

Kerala Savaari is not an isolated case. Across the Majority World and parts of East Asia, governments have launched public or quasi-public platform alternatives in transport and delivery services. Most have struggled. Where some have succeeded, such as China's Shouqi Yueche or Brazil's Taxi Rio, it was seen that 'state-capitalist discipline,' not democratic ownership, has achieved this success. Even where workers have some degree of sovereignty, it remains secondary to the demands of efficiency and managerial control.

The central question guiding this report is therefore not whether public platform cooperatives are desirable, but under what political, infrastructural, and institutional conditions the state can support platform cooperatives without capturing them and what creates an enabling environment for them to operate and flourish.

2. Research Focus

The core objective goal of this research is to examine how public policy interventions shape the governance, viability, and democratic potential of platform alternatives and platform cooperatives, particularly in cases where the State acts as owner, funder, or infrastructural enabler. To achieve this, the study pursues three core, interrelated research objectives:

2.1 Analysing Successes and Failures in State-Backed Platforms

The first focus seeks to understand why certain state-backed platforms succeeded at scale while others have failed. Comparing Kerala Savaari, BaedalTeukgeup, and Coomappa with cases such as Shouqi Yueche and Taxi.Rio reveals starkly different trajectories. Although they all began with public objectives, only a few managed to achieve user adoption, operational stability, and market relevance. The analysis interrogates whether differences in capitalization, legal frameworks, governance models, or technological capacity best explain these outcomes.

2.2 Stakeholder Perspectives and Alignment with Cooperative Principles

Within the second focus, this research examines how key stakeholder groups, such as platform workers, labor unions, state agencies, technology partners, and cooperative federations, shape and contest the cooperative character of state-supported platform initiatives and how these dynamics align with the sev-

en principles of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). Rather than treating platform cooperatives as unified organizational forms, the analysis approaches them as contested institutional arrangements in which power over governance, data, pricing, and platform design is unevenly distributed.

Worker and union perspectives often emphasize income stability, algorithmic transparency, and meaningful participation in decision-making, while state actors tend to frame platform cooperatives as instruments of public service delivery, sometimes in tension with principles of autonomy and democratic control. These stakeholder dynamics are critical for assessing whether initiatives such as India's proposed National Taxi Cooperative would be able to move beyond nominal cooperation toward substantively worker-governed digital platforms.

2.3 Developing Policy Recommendations for Viable Public–Cooperative Platforms

The third focus is explicitly normative. Drawing from comparative evidence and stakeholder perspectives, this ICDE report develops policy recommendations aimed at regional and national governments considering platform cooperatives. Rather than treating failure as proof of impossibility, the report identifies institutional design choices that either undermine or enable cooperative viability.

3. Literature Review: Platform Cooperativism and the State

The Structural Case for Platform Cooperatives

The emergence of platform cooperativism as both a scholarly field and a policy discourse is closely tied to critiques of platform capitalism and its effects on labour, markets, and democratic governance. Early work in this area identifies the dominant platform model as one characterised by value extraction, algorithmic control, and the systematic externalisation of risk onto workers, a phenomenon often described as "crowd fleecing" (Scholz, 2016). From this perspective, plat-

form cooperatives are framed as a structural alternative that seeks to realign ownership, governance, and value distribution by embedding cooperative principles into digital infrastructures.

A growing body of literature has explored the feasibility and limits of this alternative. Scholars highlight the normative strengths of platform cooperatives, such as democratic governance, member economic participation, and concern for community, while also documenting their structural disadvantages in markets shaped by network effects, venture capital subsidies, and rapid technological iteration (Bunders et al., 2022; Scholz et al., 2022). In sectors such as ride-hailing and delivery, where liquidity and scale are decisive, cooperative platforms often struggle to compete with incumbent firms that can sustain prolonged losses in pursuit of market dominance.

Distinguishing State Ownership from State-Supported Cooperation

Within this debate, the role of the state has become increasingly salient. Some authors argue that public policy interventions, through subsidies, procurement preferences, or public ownership can help platform cooperatives overcome early-stage barriers and counterbalance private platform power. Others caution that state involvement introduces its own set of risks, particularly when bureaucratic governance structures displace democratic member control. This tension has led to a growing distinction in the literature between private, state-owned platforms and cooperative platforms supported by the state, a distinction that is not merely semantic but central to questions of autonomy and power (Cumbers & Hanna, 2023).

Recent empirical studies complicate this picture further by drawing attention to the infrastructural dimensions of platform governance. Even where ownership and governance structures are formally cooperative, reliance on proprietary digital infrastructures—such as cloud services, mapping APIs, and app distribution platforms—can significantly constrain operational autonomy. Estima and Lemos (2025) describe this condition as “disciplined autonomy,” in which local or coop-

erative initiatives retain nominal control but remain structurally subordinated to global technology monopolies. This line of scholarship shifts analytical focus away from organisational form alone toward the political economy of digital infrastructure, suggesting that cooperative ownership at the application layer may be insufficient without greater control over the underlying technical stack.

Rethinking Success, Failure, and Democratic Outcomes

Another strand of the literature interrogates how success and failure in platform cooperativism should be evaluated. While market share and user adoption are often treated as primary indicators, several authors argue for broader evaluative frameworks that include governance quality, worker well-being, institutional learning, and normative impact. The post-mortem analysis of the artist-owned platform Ampled illustrates this tension: although the platform ultimately ceased operations, some scholars and practitioners view it as a success in terms of democratic design and cultural influence, raising questions about whether closure necessarily constitutes failure. These debates underscore the need for context-sensitive evaluation criteria, particularly for initiatives that explicitly prioritise democratic governance over rapid growth.

Despite these advances, the literature reveals two persistent gaps. First, there remains limited comparative analysis of state-led platform cooperatives across different political economies, particularly in the Global South, where cooperative traditions often coexist with strong state involvement. Second, existing studies frequently examine governance, infrastructure, or labour politics in isolation, rather than analysing how these dimensions interact in practice. This report addresses these gaps by offering a comparative political economy analysis of state-backed platform initiatives across India, South Korea, Brazil, and China, using the cooperative principles of the International Co-operative Alliance as an analytical lens to assess how governance design, stakeholder power, and infrastructural dependence shape outcomes.

4. Case Studies

4.1 Kerala Savaari 1.0 : Bureaucratic Ownership and the Failure of Worker Sovereignty

Kerala Savaari, a ride-hailing platform with zero commission fees, no surge pricing and a 'direct to driver' payment system, was created by the provincial Government of the southern Indian State of Kerala. It was administratively housed within the Government's Department of Labour and operationally linked to the Kerala Motor Transport Workers Welfare Fund Board (KMTWWFB), a State entity dedicated to the welfare and support of individuals involved in the transportation sector. This institutional location shaped the platform from its inception. Rather than being treated as a living digital product requiring continuous iteration, Kerala Savaari was governed as a welfare instrument, which subjected it to restrictions of the State's annual budget cycles, procurement rules, and hierarchical decision-making. This bureaucratic logic proved fatal.

Fiscal Constraint, Technical Weakness, and Absent Worker Control

Unlike venture-funded platforms that burn capital to achieve liquidity, Kerala Savaari was expected to be fiscally prudent from the outset. It had no marketing budget capable of generating network effects, no technical team empowered to push rapid updates, and no institutional tolerance for experimentation or failure. Software procurement prioritized compliance over competence and competitiveness, resulting in an application that was slow, unreliable, and functionally obsolete at launch.

More critically, drivers were never positioned as owners. They were enrolled as beneficiaries of a (yet another) state scheme rather than members of a cooperative enterprise. There were no mechanisms for collective decision-making, no elected representation in platform governance, and no meaningful access to data or pricing logic. In cooperative terms, Kerala Savaari violated the principle of autonomy not by accident, but by design.

The state acted simultaneously as owner, regulator, and operator, collapsing distinctions that are essential for democratic control. What emerged was not a platform cooperative but a digitized extension of the welfare bureaucracy. Even though this socialist State's intent was forward-looking and welfare-oriented, its design and implementation failed Kerala Savaari's normative idea miserably.

4.1.1 Kerala Savaari (India) : Technological Debt and User Attrition

Technological limitations played a central role in accelerating Kerala Savaari's decline. From its launch, the application was widely reported to be unstable, slow, and functionally inferior to private alternatives. Users encountered frequent glitches, inaccurate ride matching, poor navigation, and delayed response times. Drivers reported difficulty in accepting rides, inconsistent trip allocation, and a lack of basic features that had become standard in commercial ride-hailing platforms. These technical deficiencies were not marginal inconveniences; they directly undermined trust in the platform's reliability.

Technical Capacity Constraints and User Attrition

Crucially, Kerala Savaari did not possess an in-house technical team with the authority or capacity to rapidly iterate on the platform. Software development and maintenance were governed through external procurement and was supported by another Government entity, ITI Limited (formerly Indian Telephone Industries, a Central-Public Sector Undertaking that worked in the telecommunications sector in post-independent India). Often such processes prioritized contractual compliance over technical excellence. Updates were infrequent, bug fixes slow, and user feedback mechanisms largely absent. In effect, the platform accumulated what can be described as technological debt, which refers to a widening gap between user expectations shaped by dominant platforms and the actual performance of the state-run app.

Drivers, despite initial enthusiasm, exited the platform as ride volumes stagnated and earnings remained unpredictable. Passengers, encountering unreliable service and poor user experience, reverted to private aggregators despite higher costs. The platform entered a negative feedback loop: declining usage further reduced liquidity, which in turn made the app even less attractive to remaining users. Kerala Savaari thus illustrated a fundamental contradiction: when the state attempts to substitute platform capitalism without relinquishing bureaucratic control, it risks reproducing domination through administrative means rather than algorithmic ones.

Importantly, these failures were not framed publicly as design or governance failures. When Kerala Savaari was eventually shut down in October 2024. However, the State Government did not issue a formal post-mortem. Instead, the platform quietly ceased operations, with subsequent announcements framing the episode as a temporary pause pending "relaunch" or "revamp." This discursive strategy not only avoided acknowledging systemic failure, but it also foreclosed opportunities for institutional learning.

4.2 Kerala Savaari 2.0 (India): Open Technology, Multimodality, and the State's Limits

Kerala Savaari 2.0 was re-launched by the State's Labour Minister with much fanfare on 1st week of November 2025, when the State celebrated Kerala Piravi (formation day / birthday of Kerala). The relaunch represented a corrective turn in the state's approach to public platform development. While Kerala Savaari 1.0 was India's first state government–owned ride-hailing platform, its second iteration has been repackaged and publicly framed as the country's first integrated, multimodal transport application. This positioning reflects a broader political tradition in Kerala: a long-standing emphasis on pioneering path-breaking initiatives, even as questions of follow-through, institutional depth, and long-term sustainability often remain.

Technological Architecture

The most substantive shift in Savaari 2.0 lies in how it is built. The platform is now built on the open, interoperable mobility stack used by Namma Yatri, (developed by Moving Tech) and continued to be supported by ITI Ltd., Palakkad. This development marks a clear departure from the procurement-driven, proprietary software model that undermined Savaari 1.0. By adopting open digital infrastructure, the state has addressed some of the technical debt that previously rendered the platform unreliable, including failures in ride matching, navigation, and transaction stability.

Kerala Savaari 2.0 also refined its economic and operational logic. The platform retains a zero-commission structure, replacing per-ride deductions with a nominal subscription fee, while continuing to operate under government-fixed fares. Rather than competing with private platforms through surge pricing or aggressive expansion, the app is positioned as a regulated public alternative aimed at income predictability for drivers and affordability for passengers.

Multimodal ambition

A defining feature of the relaunch is its multimodal ambition. The State plans envision Savaari 2.0, leveraging Namma Yatri's technology platform, evolving into a unified mobility interface integrating Kerala's Kochi Metro, Water Metro, feeder buses, autorickshaws, taxis, and ancillary services such as ambulance booking and ticketing. This repositioning embeds the platform within Kerala's wider public transport ecosystem, shifting its value proposition from stand-alone ride-hailing to system-level coordination. Early uptake during the pilot phase, including the platform crossing one lakh rides, suggests improved adoption compared to the first iteration, though long-term viability remains uncertain.

Upgraded Platform, Unchanged Governance Structure

Despite these advances, Kerala Savaari 2.0's impact only remains partial and conditional and can hardly be claimed a success. The state has learned from a few of its past operational and technological mistakes; issues of worker sovereignty and governance still remain unaddressed. Drivers continue to participate primarily as users of a state-managed service rather than as collective owners with meaningful decision-making power. Control over pricing, data governance, and platform evolution remains concentrated within state institutions and technical partners, rather than being democratically devolved.

Kerala Savaari 2.0 thus occupies an intermediate position between failure and transformation. It shows that states can modernise public platforms through open technology and multimodal integration, but also underscores the limits of reform when cooperative principles are treated as distributive outcomes rather than institutional commitments.

Whether Savaari 2.0 evolves into a genuinely worker-governed platform or stabilises as a technologically improved but administratively controlled public service remains an open question with direct implications and learnings, for similar pioneering platform alternatives at the National level such as India's 'Sahkar Taxi Cooperative'.

4.3 BaedalTeukgeup (South Korea): Public Platforms under Conditions of Extreme Market Power

The case of BaedalTeukgeup in South Korea demonstrates that the failure of public platform initiatives cannot be attributed simply to weak state capacity or technological inadequacy. Unlike Kerala Savaari, which was shaped by welfare-bureaucratic logics and limited digital agility, BaedalTeukgeup emerged within a

highly digitized economy, supported by a capable provincial government and a technologically sophisticated user base. Its failure instead reveals a different structural constraint: the difficulty of sustaining public or cooperative platforms in markets already characterized by extreme concentration, lock-in effects, and intense platform competition.

BaedalTeukgeup and the Inability to Attract Sufficient Consumer Demand

Launched by the Gyeonggi provincial government, BaedalTeukgeup aimed to counter rising commission fees imposed by dominant private delivery platforms on small restaurants. This intervention responded to widespread concern that firms such as Baedal Minjok (Baemin), Coupang Eats, and Yogiyo had consolidated near-total market control, leaving merchants with limited bargaining power and high switching costs. The public platform sought to address this imbalance not through regulation alone, but by offering a lower-commission alternative grounded in public-interest objectives.

While BaedalTeukgeup initially attracted restaurant participation, its initial success did not translate into sustained viability because the platform failed to generate sufficient consumer-side liquidity. Private incumbents responded aggressively with discounts, free-delivery campaigns, loyalty programs, and exclusive partnerships, tactics made possible by deep capital reserves and cross-subsidization. Against this backdrop, BaedalTeukgeup struggled to compete on convenience, choice, and speed. Ethical appeal and lower fees proved insufficient to overcome the entrenched habits and expectations shaped by dominant platforms.

Operational Limitations

Operational limitations also contributed to the platform's weaknesses, with the app's delivery logistics remaining fragmented, relying on loosely coordinated couriers and external services rather than an integrated and dense network. This

lack of integration resulted in uneven service quality, longer delivery times, and inconsistent coverage. Therefore, although the platform was not technologically dysfunctional per se, it lacked the logistical depth and continuous optimization required to operate effectively in a mature platform market.

Governance Design

Governance design compounded these challenges despite the app's public-interest framing and BaedalTeukgeup did not institutionalize cooperative governance. Restaurants and delivery workers were mostly seen as users, not co-owners, and they had little say over pricing, data governance, or platform rules. Decision-making remained centralized within public administration, reproducing a top-down model that conflicted with cooperative principles of democratic member control and economic participation.

Correct Diagnosis, Insufficient Competitive Capacity

The political economy of public platforms in South Korea made the initiative even harder to carry out. At the same time, competition authorities were looking into private delivery platforms for anti-competitive behavior, such as mergers and commission practices. This regulatory scrutiny confirmed the apprehensions that inspired BaedalTeukgeup, yet it also highlighted a fundamental paradox: that public platforms are frequently anticipated to rectify market failures without being afforded the requisite time, capital, or strategic flexibility to thrive in the same markets. Unlike private incumbents, BaedalTeukgeup could not justify prolonged losses, aggressive subsidy campaigns, or rapid strategic pivots, given fiscal accountability norms and political oversight.

BaedalTeukgeup's decline is a sign of a structural mismatch between the goals of public policy and the realities of the platform economy and marketplace. The platform succeeded in demonstrating that commission levels and governance arrangements are political choices rather than technological inevitabilities, but it failed to convert this normative critique into a self-sustaining market alternative.

In this sense, it represents a “noble failure” distinct from yet complementary to Kerala Savaari: where Kerala Savaari collapsed under bureaucratic ownership and technological stagnation, BaedalTeukgeup faltered under market concentration, capital asymmetry, and the absence of democratic co-governance capable of generating durable stakeholder loyalty.

4.4 Coomappa (Araraquara, Brazil): Democratic Ownership and the Limits of Infrastructural Autonomy

The case of Coomappa, a driver-owned ride-hailing cooperative based in Araraquara city in the State of Sao Paolo in Brazil, represents one of the most substantively democratic experiments in platform cooperativism in the Global South. Unlike Kerala Savaari or BaedalTeukgeup, Coomappa did not emerge as a state-owned or state-operated platform. Instead, it took the form of a municipal-supported but worker-governed cooperative, positioning drivers as member-owners rather than beneficiaries or contractors. This distinction is analytically significant: Coomappa demonstrates that democratic governance and fairer income distribution are achievable in platform work, even within highly competitive markets.

Launched in response to declining driver incomes and rising fuel costs, Coomappa adopted an explicitly redistributive economic model. Drivers retained approximately 95 % of fare revenue, fares were transparent, and surge pricing was eliminated. These design choices translated into immediate material gains for workers, who earned substantially more than on dominant commercial platforms, while passengers benefited from predictable pricing and low cancellation rates. Early adoption and user satisfaction suggested that cooperative platforms could compete on trust and fairness, not merely on price.

Worker Control Constrained by Upstream Platform Dependencies

From the standpoint of cooperative principles, Coomappa came closer than most state-backed initiatives to realizing democratic member control and economic participation. Drivers exercised collective authority over internal rules and revenue distribution, and the platform was embedded within a broader local solidarity-economy agenda supported by progressive municipal leadership. Unlike state-owned platforms, legitimacy here derives from worker agency and local participation rather than administrative mandate.

However, Coomappa's path also showed a structural weakness that governance design alone couldn't fix. Despite democratic ownership, the platform relied on proprietary software vendors and global digital services—such as mapping APIs and cloud infrastructure—for its core operations. As the platform scaled, these dependencies generated rising and inflexible costs over which the cooperative had no control. Drivers could vote on fares and internal governance, but they could not influence upstream pricing, data governance terms, or software update cycles dictated by external providers.

Application-Level Democracy Under Infrastructural Dependence

This condition exemplifies "disciplined autonomy" (Estima & Lemos, 2025), a situation in which cooperative initiatives retain formal ownership and internal democracy, yet remain structurally subordinated to global technological and infrastructural monopolies. In Coomappa's case, autonomy existed at the organizational layer but was constrained at the infrastructural layer, ultimately undermining long-term sustainability despite strong local demand and worker commitment.

Coomappa therefore complicates binary narratives of success and failure in platform cooperativism. It succeeded in showing that worker-owned platforms can deliver fairer incomes, transparent pricing, and community trust. At the same

time, it revealed that democratic governance at the application level is insufficient without corresponding control over the infrastructural layer. The case strengthens a central argument of this report: that the future of platform cooperativism depends not only on ownership and governance but also on the political economy of the digital systems on which platforms are built.

However, as observed in comparable cases, commission structures themselves can become sites of contestation, with disagreements over fee levels influencing driver trust and long-term platform adoption.

Municipal initiatives

Beyond Coomappa, Araraquara had emerged as an important experimental site for public policy-led platform cooperativism. Araraquara's wider ecosystem reinforces this interpretation. Municipal initiatives such as the Coopera Araraquara incubator, alongside platforms like AppJusto and Señoritas Courier illustrate both the possibilities and fragilities of cooperative platforms. While they emerged within supportive policy environments, both initiatives ultimately struggled to sustain operations, highlighting the limits of partial or inconsistent public support. Rather than demonstrating successful enablement, these cases underscore that cooperative platforms remain structurally vulnerable in the absence of sustained public procurement, funding, and institutional backing.

The Coopera Araraquara municipal programme represents a more systemic approach, operating as a public solidarity-economy incubator designed to support the creation, consolidation, and long-term sustainability of cooperatives and associative enterprises. Through this program, the local government has actively supported initiatives such as Morada Car (driver services) and Morada Express (food delivery), framing platform cooperatives not as market disruptors alone but as instruments of local economic development and public-service provision. By integrating cooperative enterprises into municipal procurement and service delivery, the program illustrates how the state can function as an enabling partner rather than a platform owner, reducing early-stage risk while preserving worker control.

Across these cases, a recurring pattern emerges: platform cooperatives and public alternatives do not fail due to weak ethical design or lack of intent, but due to structural constraints. These include adverse market conditions shaped by capital-intensive incumbents, the absence of procurement-backed demand, and dependence on external digital infrastructures. Without addressing these structural factors, even well-designed cooperative platforms struggle to translate normative advantages into durable market viability.

4.5 Shouqi Yueche (China): State-Capitalist Success through Scale, Regulatory Alignment, and Infrastructural Integration

The case of Shouqi Yueche represents the most durable example of a successful state-backed digital mobility platform operating at national scale and thus serves as a critical counterpoint to the failures and fragilities observed in Kerala Savaari, BaedalTeukgeup, and Coomappa. Importantly, Shouqi Yueche did not emerge from the platform cooperativism tradition, nor did it attempt to democratize platform ownership or governance. Instead, it consolidated a state-capitalist platform model, in which public ownership, capital depth, and regulatory coordination were leveraged to compete effectively within a highly contested platform market.

Shouqi Yueche and the Advantages of State-Capitalist Embedding

Institutionally, Shouqi Yueche is embedded within China's broader system of state-owned enterprise (SOE) reform trajectory, operating under the Beijing Tourism Group and benefiting from long-standing public transport, fleet management, and service-delivery capacities. This positioning afforded the platform structural advantages unavailable to most public or cooperative alternatives: access to patient capital, cross-subsidization from related transport and tourism services, and direct alignment with municipal and national policy priorities. Unlike welfare-oriented public platforms constrained by annual budgets or

procurement rigidities, Shouqi Yueche was able to sustain long-term investment in software development, dispatch algorithms, compliance systems, and fleet modernization.

Shouqi Yueche's market success was also the result of strategic segmentation rather than universal competition. Instead of competing head-on in the informal, price-sensitive consumer-to-consumer (C2C) segment dominated by private platforms, Shouqi Yueche focused on licensed vehicles, professional drivers, and regulated service environments. Airports, railway hubs, state agencies, and corporate clients became anchor users, allowing the platform to embed itself within China's formal urban transport infrastructure. This strategy reduced exposure to destructive price wars and aligned the platform with regulatory objectives related to safety, data oversight, and labour formalization.

Regulatory Alignment and Competitive Capacity After 2021

Regulatory alignment proved decisive, particularly following China's tightening of platform governance after 2021. As private ride-hailing platforms faced antitrust scrutiny, data-governance restrictions, and labor-compliance mandates, Shouqi Yueche was positioned as a politically trusted alternative that already conformed to licensing requirements, driver qualification rules, and local transport regulations. In this context, success was not merely technological or commercial, but institutional: the platform thrived because it was legible, governable, and compatible with the state's evolving approach to digital capitalism.

Operationally, Shouqi Yueche succeeded because it fully internalized the logic of platform competition. It invested heavily in user experience, reliability, multimodal integration, and backend optimization, ensuring that its service met the expectations shaped by dominant private platforms. Unlike Kerala Savaari or BaedalTeukgeup, Shouqi Yueche did not rely on ethical appeal or public legitimacy alone; it competed on "design, logistics, and ease." Scale was not an accidental by-product of state support but a deliberate design goal supported by capital, managerial authority, and infrastructural coordination.

State-Capitalist Viability and Democratic Exclusion

However, this success involved clear and consequential trade-offs. Shouqi Yueche does not align with cooperative principles of democratic member control or worker ownership. Drivers are incorporated as employees or regulated contractors within a hierarchical governance structure, with limited influence over pricing, algorithmic management, or data governance. While this model delivers greater stability, regulatory compliance, and service continuity than many private platforms, it does so through administrative discipline rather than worker sovereignty. Democratic participation is replaced by managerial oversight; collective ownership is substituted by state ownership.

Shouqi Yueche thus illustrates a central tension in debates on state-backed platform alternatives. It demonstrates that the state can successfully operate digital platforms at scale, but often only by reproducing core features of platform capitalism, which are centralized control, capital intensity, and technocratic governance, albeit being under public ownership. In this sense, Shouqi Yueche is best understood not as a model of platform cooperativism, but as a benchmark of state-capitalist viability against which cooperative and hybrid models are implicitly measured and often found wanting.

For the purposes of this report, Shouqi Yueche functions as a critical analytical counter-model. It clarifies that the failure of public or cooperative platforms is not inevitable, but also that success under current platform conditions is frequently achieved by sidelining democratic governance. The challenge facing initiatives such as India's proposed National Taxi Cooperative is therefore not simply whether platforms can scale, but whether they can do so without abandoning the principles of worker control, autonomy, and collective ownership that motivate platform cooperativism in the first place.

4.6 Taxi.Rio (Brazil): Municipal Digital Infrastructure without Worker Governance

The case of Taxi.Rio represents one of the more durable examples of a state-led digital mobility platform, yet it does so by deliberately avoiding the ambitions of platform capitalism or platform cooperativism. Developed and operated by the Rio de Janeiro City Hall, Taxi.Rio functions as a municipal urban mobility application designed to connect passengers with licensed taxi drivers through a publicly provided, commission-free digital interface. Its stated objectives are safety, regulatory compliance, and service reliability, rather than market disruption or worker ownership.

Taxi.Rio's relative success is best understood through its institutional embeddedness. Unlike Kerala Savaari or BaedalTeukgeup, the platform did not attempt to create a new labor market or reorganize informal work. Instead, it digitized an already regulated sector, integrating licensed taxi drivers into a city-managed dispatch system. This allowed Taxi.Rio to bypass the "cold start" problem that undermines many platform alternatives, as both driver supply and consumer demand were already anchored in existing urban transport arrangements. The platform's availability on mainstream app stores, its simple passenger interface, and its clear linkage to municipal oversight contributed to user trust and adoption.

Better Driver Earnings Under Municipal Control

From an economic standpoint, Taxi.Rio's commission-free model is central to its appeal for drivers. The app keeps fares stable and earnings predictable by getting rid of platform commissions and surge pricing. It also gives drivers some freedom to offer discounts within certain limits. This model contrasts sharply with private ride-hailing platforms that rely on dynamic pricing and high commission extraction, and it has enabled Taxi.Rio to function as a credible public-facing alternative in dense urban contexts.

However, Taxi.Rio is not a cooperative platform, nor does it claim to be one. Drivers do not own the platform, collectively govern its rules, or exercise democratic control over data, pricing algorithms, or strategic direction. Decision-making authority remains firmly with municipal administrators, situating Taxi.Rio within a public utility paradigm rather than a worker-governed enterprise. In this way, its success depends more on how well the administration works together and how legal the rules are than on values like member control or independence.

VC-Funded Namma Yatri, Bangalore, India

This distinction becomes clearer when Taxi.Rio is contrasted with experiments such as Namma Yatri in Bangalore in Karnataka, which have also been commercially successful. As noted in comparative policy analyses, Namma Yatri initially succeeded in mobilizing drivers through a collaborative approach, supported by civil society actors and participatory design processes. Drivers felt included in early decision-making, which incentivized onboarding and trust. But this partnership got weaker over time because drivers weren't included in important management decisions, and their suggestions weren't taken into account. The erosion of meaningful representation ultimately limited the platform's ability to serve driver interests sustainably. Taxi.Rio avoids this particular failure not by deepening participation, but by never promising democratic governance in the first place.

Stable Public Platforms Without Democratic Ownership

In this regard, Taxi.Rio illustrates a crucial but often overlooked category of platform success: viability without worker sovereignty. It shows that governments can deploy digital platforms to improve service delivery, reduce extraction, and stabilize incomes within regulated sectors, without confronting deeper questions about ownership or power. At the same time, it also demonstrates the limits of such an approach. While Taxi.Rio corrects some market failures of platform

capitalism, it leaves intact hierarchical governance structures in which workers remain service providers rather than collective decision-makers.

For the broader argument of this report, Taxi.Rio serves as an important boundary case. It confirms that public digital platforms can be operationally stable and socially useful when embedded in existing regulatory ecosystems, yet it also underscores that public provision alone does not constitute platform cooperativism.

For similar innovations and initiatives in the digital platform economy, the lesson is not simply that municipal platforms can work, but that without institutionalized mechanisms for representation and co-governance, success will be limited to service efficiency rather than democratic transformation of the platform economy.

4.7 Comparative Synthesis: From Welfare Platforms to State-Capitalist Scale

Taken together, the cases examined in this report reveal that the success or failure of public platform initiatives cannot be explained by the presence or absence of the state per se, but by how state power is configured in relation to governance, infrastructure, and market competition.

Lessons from Four Platform Trajectories

Kerala Savaari, BaedalTeukgeup, Coomappa, and Shouqi Yueche each illuminate a distinct configuration of the relationship between the state, workers, capital, and digital infrastructure. Kerala Savaari exemplifies a bureaucratic-governance constraint: the state sought to correct market failures through public ownership, but did so by concentrating authority within administrative structures rather than devolving it to workers. The result was a platform with political legitimacy but weak adaptive capacity, limited technical responsiveness, and little institutional

basis for worker commitment beyond participation in a state scheme. BaedalTeukgeup reveals a market-structure constraint: even where the state is technologically capable and the critique of private platform power is widely shared, public alternatives remain vulnerable when entering highly concentrated markets without the subsidy depth, strategic flexibility, or mobilized user base needed to generate liquidity at scale. Accurate diagnosis of market failure, in this case, did not translate into competitive viability.

Coomappa highlights an infrastructural-dependence constraint. Although it came closer than most cases to realizing worker participation and local accountability, its reliance on proprietary software and upstream digital services exposed it to structural dependencies that cooperative governance alone could not overcome. Shouqi Yueche, by contrast, illustrates a democratic-governance constraint within state-capitalist success: public platforms can achieve scale, durability, and market stability when capital, regulation, managerial coordination, and technological capacity are tightly aligned, but often only by subordinating worker participation to administrative control, service efficiency, and regulatory legibility.

An important but underexplored factor across successful public platforms is the role of state-backed demand through public procurement. Platforms such as Taxi.Rio and emerging federal models in Brazil benefit not only from regulatory support but from guaranteed usage through institutional demand (e.g., civil servant mobility). This reduces exposure to volatile consumer markets and provides a baseline level of liquidity. In contrast, platforms that rely solely on open-market competition face significantly higher barriers to sustainability.

Taken together, these cases suggest that the decisive variable is not whether the state intervenes, but how that intervention is institutionally configured. Public platforms tend to stall under four recurrent constraints: bureaucratic centralization, adverse market structure, infrastructural dependence, and the suppression of democratic governance in the name of efficiency. Platform durability, by contrast, becomes more likely when governance, finance, infrastructure, and

regulation are closely aligned, even if this comes at the expense of cooperative principles. This comparison provides the analytical basis for evaluating India's proposed National Taxi Cooperative. The central question is whether Sahkar Taxi can combine the enabling capacities of the state with genuine worker governance, while avoiding both the bureaucratic stagnation of Kerala Savaari and the technocratic centralization exemplified by Shouqi Yueche.
These comparative constraints provide the context for examining India's Sahkar Taxi initiative.

5. Sahkar Taxi (India): Designing a State-Supported Cooperative at a Massive, National Scale

Sahkar Taxi, India's emerging national taxi cooperative, branded on app stores as Bharat Taxi, represents the most ambitious attempt to date to construct a state-supported, driver-owned digital mobility platform at a national scale. Sahkar Taxi is formally constituted as a multi-state cooperative society under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, with drivers positioned as member-owners rather than beneficiaries. This distinction is not cosmetic and marks a deliberate effort by the Indian State to reposition itself from platform owner to institutional enabler, while retaining a strong coordinating role through policy, capital, and digital infrastructure.

The official nationwide launch of Sahkar Taxi happened on New Year's Day on 1st January 2026, with over 110,000 drivers registered across vehicle categories, strong consumer uptake, and the Bharat Taxi app even crossing one lakh downloads and climbing app-store rankings ahead of the official national launch.

The institutional architecture of Sahkar Taxi reflects this hybrid logic. The cooperative has been registered with an authorized share capital of ₹300 crore (approx. USD 36 million), signalling an explicit recognition that cooperative platforms might require significant upfront capital to compete in two-sided digital markets. Its promoters include eight major cooperative institutions, and amongst them

are Indian cooperative-conglomerates like IFFCO and Amul, and cooperative development entities such as the NCDC and NABARD, whose involvement provides not only financial backing but also organisational legitimacy and access to cooperative networks across states. This promoter structure directly addresses one of the principal failures of Kerala Savaari, namely the absence of a capital buffer and ecosystem support capable of sustaining early losses and user acquisition costs

Technology Platform

The Request for Proposal issued in mid-2025 for the Sahkar Taxi digital platform indicates a deliberate departure from the procurement logic that undermined earlier state-led initiatives. Rather than treating the application as a one-time software deliverable, the RFP emphasized long-term scalability, continuous upgrades, interoperability, cybersecurity, and user experience across both driver and consumer interfaces. Sahkar Taxi's technology platform is being developed through a multi-year contract built on the open mobility stack associated with Namma Yatri. This marks a significant institutional learning from prior failures: instead of commissioning bespoke government software with limited iteration capacity, Sahkar Taxi is adopting a production-grade platform architecture already deployed in multiple Indian cities.

At the same time, this technological choice requires analytical clarity. Namma Yatri is not a cooperative. It is operated by Moving Tech, a venture-backed private company that raised $11 million in 2024 in a funding round led by Blume Ventures and Antler, with participation from Google and other investors. Third-party financial dependencies make it financially accountable to the investors. This is a key difference where control is held by member -owners. While its stack is often described as open, modular, and community-led, it does not amount to worker ownership or democratic member control in the cooperative sense. Sahkar Taxi is not inheriting a cooperative infrastructure so much as entering into a partnership with an external private technology provider.

This does, however, still represent an advance over earlier state-led models. The Namma Yatri stack supports interoperable mobility services across cars, trucks, two-wheelers, and multimodal public transport connections, and a multi-year partnership reduces the risk of rapid technical obsolescence and procurement-driven stagnation of the kind that plagued Kerala Savaari. But it also raises a new and analytically important question: whether dependence on an external, investor-backed platform provider can be structured in ways that preserve member control over data, algorithms, and platform evolution. In this sense, Sahkar Taxi's technology choice is both a practical improvement and a live test of whether infrastructural partnerships can be governed cooperatively rather than merely outsourced, a common learning from the case of Coomappa in Brazil as well .

Governance Features

At the level of governance, Sahkar Taxi's by-laws and policy notes articulate a commitment to cooperative principles that goes beyond rhetoric. Drivers must pay a small fee to become members of the cooperative, and the governance framework allows driver-members to be on the board, vote, and receive dividends from any extra money made. Importantly, the platform adopts a zero-commission or nominal subscription model, allowing drivers to retain the full fare from each trip. This directly addresses the central grievance animating resistance to private aggregators and aligns closely with the ICA cooperative principle of member economic participation.

However, the comparative cases analyzed in this report suggest that formal alignment with cooperative principles does not, by itself, guarantee democratic control in practice. The critical question is whether drivers will exercise substantive authority over pricing logic, data governance, and platform rules, or whether these decisions will remain effectively centralized within technical teams, promoter institutions, or state-linked agencies. The involvement of the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) and other apex bodies creates both an opportunity and a risk: while they can shield the cooperative from market vol-

atility and early-stage fragility, they may also introduce new forms of technocratic or institutional dominance unless governance safeguards are actively enforced. The early rollout data shared by the Ministry of Cooperation from late 2025 and early 2026 shows some promising signs, as pilot programs and test launches in Delhi and parts of Gujarat are quickly onboarding new drivers.

Working together with public transportation systems like the Delhi Metro and safety partnerships with local police suggest a focus on making transportation a public service instead of just competing in the market. These features set Sahkar Taxi apart from Kerala Savaari, which didn't have effective integration, and from Shouqi Yueche, where state support focused mainly on efficiency instead of community ownership.

Why Sahkar Taxi's Early Gains Require Cautious Interpretation

Yet these early indicators should be interpreted cautiously. Initial adoption does not resolve the structural tensions that have undone previous initiatives. The absence of surge pricing, while normatively attractive, may constrain the platform's ability to manage peak demand unless alternative incentive mechanisms are democratically designed and transparently governed. Similarly, the promise of driver dividends presupposes long-term financial sustainability in a market where private competitors continue to deploy aggressive discounts and cross-subsidization strategies. The cooperative's reliance on public digital infrastructure and state-facilitated partnerships may mitigate the risk of infrastructural dependency observed in cases like Coomappa, but only if drivers retain meaningful oversight over data flows and algorithmic decision-making.

Seen comparatively, Sahkar Taxi occupies a narrow corridor between two well-documented failure modes. It seeks to avoid the welfare-bureaucratic stagnation of Kerala Savaari by embedding cooperative ownership and capital depth, while also resisting the state-capitalist logic of Shouqi Yueche, where scale was achieved through managerial centralization and the subordination of worker voices. The sustainability of this balance continues to be an open empirical ques-

tion. What distinguishes Sahkar Taxi from earlier experiments is not a guarantee of success, but the seriousness with which institutional design, capitalization, and infrastructure have been addressed from the outset.

Sahkar Taxi as an Institutional Experiment Under Investor Pressure

Therefore, Sahkar Taxi is to be viewed less as a completed model and more as an ongoing institutional experiment. Its trajectory will test whether the Indian state can support platform cooperatives without absorbing them and whether cooperative governance can survive the pressures of scale, competition, and technological complexity. The implications extend beyond mobility. If Sahkar Taxi succeeds in institutionalizing worker control while remaining operationally viable, it may offer a transferable template for other sectors of the gig economy. If it fails, it will reinforce the argument that without deeper reforms in governance design and digital infrastructure, state-supported platform cooperativism risks oscillating between symbolic intervention and technocratic capture.

6. Policy Pathways for State-Supported Platform Cooperatives

Practical Design Principles for Governments and Policymakers

Comparative experience across India, South Korea, Brazil, and China indicates that state-supported platform cooperatives fail or succeed less because of intent and more because of institutional design choices. The following policy recommendations distill these lessons into practical guidance for governments seeking to enable platform cooperatives without undermining worker ownership or democratic control.

1. Separate State Oversight from Platform Governance

Governments should avoid combining the roles of regulator, owner, and operator within the same public authority. Platform cooperatives must be established as independent legal entities, with the state acting only as regulator, enabler, or purchaser of services. Housing platforms within welfare boards or line departments should be avoided, as this subjects them to rigid budget cycles, procurement rules, and hierarchical decision-making that are incompatible with platform operations.

2. Mandate Binding Worker Control, Not Advisory Participation

Worker participation must extend beyond consultation or advisory roles. Cooperative by-laws should guarantee elected worker representatives binding decision-making power over fares, incentives, data use, algorithmic rules, and grievance redressal. Governance models that treat workers as beneficiaries rather than member-owners should be explicitly excluded, and voting power of state nominees, technical partners, or apex institutions must be clearly limited.

3. Treat Early Financial Losses as Structural, Not Managerial Failure

Platform cooperatives operate in markets shaped by network effects and require sustained early investment to achieve liquidity. Governments should anticipate initial losses and provide time-bound public support through subsidies, guarantees, or demand-side integration, without taking equity or operational control. Public funding should be linked to social performance benchmarks such as income stability, geographic coverage, and safety, rather than short-term profitability.

4. Avoiding Commission Absolutism and Allowing Flexible Cooperative Pricing

Mandating permanent zero-commission models can undermine long-term sustainability. Cooperatives should be allowed to collect modest, member-approved fees to fund technology upgrades, customer support, and platform maintenance. Any fee structures must be transparent, democratically approved, and subject to member oversight.

5. Embedding Platform Cooperatives within Public Mobility Systems

Platform cooperatives should not be treated as standalone apps. Governments should integrate them with public transport systems, municipal services, and urban mobility plans. Preferential access to transit hubs, airports, and public booking channels, as well as the use of public procurement to generate baseline demand, can significantly improve platform viability.

6. Reducing Dependence on Proprietary Digital Infrastructure

Governments should promote the use of open standards, interoperable protocols, and auditable algorithms. Data generated by workers must be treated as a collective asset, with clear provisions for portability and cooperative control. Exclusive dependence on single private vendors for mapping, cloud hosting, or dispatch logic should be avoided to prevent infrastructural lock-in.

7. Codifying Worker Protections within Platform Architecture

Labour protections must be embedded directly into platform design. Rules governing account suspension, ratings, penalties, and deactivation should be transparent and subject to democratic oversight. Platforms should be required to provide human-led grievance redressal mechanisms, and opaque algorithmic enforcement without due process should be prohibited.

8. Evaluating Success of Platform Beyond Market Share

Governments should adopt multi-dimensional evaluation frameworks that assess worker income stability, governance participation, service reliability, and institutional learning, rather than relying solely on market share or growth metrics. Platform closure or restructuring should not automatically be treated as policy failure if democratic capacity and worker bargaining power have improved.

9. Shift from Platform Substitution to Ecosystem Reform

Platform cooperatives cannot survive in isolation. Governments should harmonize labor laws, competition policy, data governance, and transport regulation to ensure fair competition with dominant private platforms. Platform cooperatives should be treated as public-interest digital infrastructure rather than short-term market experiments.

State-supported platform cooperatives are neither quick fixes nor symbolic alternatives. They require intentional institutional design, patient capital, and sustained governance discipline. When states attempt to own platforms directly, they risk reproducing bureaucratic domination. When they withdraw support too early, cooperatives collapse under market pressure. The policy challenge lies in supporting without capturing, enabling without directing, and regulating without displacing worker sovereignty.

7. Conclusion

Three Recurring Constraints Across Failed Cases

This report examined the expanding role of the state in the platform economy, focusing on public and cooperative alternatives to dominant investor-owned platforms. Through comparative analysis of Kerala Savaari (India), BaedalTeukgeup (South Korea), Coomappa (Brazil), Shouqi Yueche (China), and Taxi.Rio (Brazil), the report demonstrated that the success or failure of state-supported platform initiatives is not determined by state involvement per se, but by how state power is configured in relation to governance, infrastructure, and market dynamics.

Three structural patterns show up in all of the cases of failure. Kerala Savaari illustrates how direct state ownership, when embedded within welfare bureaucracies, can undermine both technological viability and democratic governance. The platform was framed as a public good but governed as an administrative scheme, resulting in weak worker participation, slow technological adaptation, and an inability to generate the liquidity required for a two-sided market. In this configuration, the state did not enable worker sovereignty but substituted for it, reproducing hierarchical control through bureaucratic means.

Market Concentration and Capital Asymmetry as Structural Constraints

BaedalTeukgeup highlights a different constraint , of operating within a technologically advanced and administratively capable state, the platform nonetheless failed to achieve sustainability in a highly concentrated market dominated by aggressive private incumbents. The collapse of BaedalTeukgeup highlights the limitations of public platforms operating without adequate capital depth, pricing flexibility, or strategic autonomy in competitive digital markets. Even where public intent and institutional capacity are strong, platform competition rewards scale, speed, and subsidy tolerance that public entities are often unwilling or unable to sustain.

Infrastructural Dependence as a Constraint on Cooperative Autonomy

Coomappa adds a further added layer of complexity by foregrounding the infrastructural dimensions of platform governance. Despite meaningful worker participation and municipal backing, the cooperative remained dependent on proprietary digital infrastructures that constrained costs, data control, and strategic decision-making. This case demonstrates that democratic ownership at the organizational level is insufficient when infrastructural autonomy is absent. Cooperative governance can be disciplined not only by the state or the market, but by the technical architectures on which platforms depend.

Platform Success Under Limited Democratic Ambition

By contrast, the relative successes of Shouqi Yueche and Taxi.Rio clarify what platform viability looks like when democratic ambition is limited. Shouqi Yueche operates at national scale through deep capitalization, regulatory alignment, and centralized managerial authority, but does so by subordinating worker participation to efficiency and control. Taxi.Rio functions effectively as a municipal mobility service, yet without offering worker ownership or democratic governance. These cases show that public platforms can succeed as utilities or state-capitalist enterprises, but that such success often comes at the expense of cooperative principles.

Sahkar Taxi, India's proposed national mobility cooperative, emerges in this landscape as a pivotal but unresolved institutional experiment. It seeks to combine cooperative ownership with scale, digital infrastructure, and state support—an ambition that directly confronts the tensions identified across the comparative cases. Early indicators of adoption suggest demand for alternatives to commission-driven platforms, but the deeper question concerns governance: whether drivers will exercise substantive control over pricing, data, algorithms, and platform evolution, or whether these powers will remain concentrated within technical partners, apex cooperative institutions, or state-linked agencies. The

outcome will depend less on formal cooperative status than on how power is distributed and exercised in practice.

The broader implication of this research is that it may not be viable to sustain platform cooperativism through ownership structures alone. Democratic governance must be embedded across the full institutional stack of the platform, encompassing legal form, capital structure, technological infrastructure, and everyday decision-making processes. For states, the challenge is not whether to intervene in platform markets, but how to do so without absorbing, disciplining, or hollowing out cooperative autonomy. Supporting without capturing, enabling without directing, and regulating without substituting worker control emerge as the core design imperatives.

Platform Cooperativism and Digital Sovereignty

Situated within ongoing debates at the Platform Cooperativism Consortium, this ICDE report contributes to a growing recognition that platform cooperativism is inseparable from questions of digital sovereignty. The struggle over platforms is ultimately a struggle over who governs digital infrastructure, who controls data and algorithms, and whose interests are encoded into the systems that organize work. State-supported platform cooperatives occupy a contested space within this struggle. They can either extend democratic control into the digital economy or reproduce existing hierarchies under a cooperative label. The cases examined here suggest that the future of platform cooperativism will not be decided by technology alone, but by political choices about power, autonomy, and the institutional conditions under which cooperation is allowed to flourish.

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